

CASE STUDY: CORRIDORS & CONNECTIONS AT VESPER MEADOW

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for *Habitat Everywhere*, a project of Greenhorns

The Vesper Meadows are 1000 acres of upland wet meadow in the Southern Cascade's high divide just east of Ashland, Oregon. Sheltered by a mixed conifer forest, the meadow seeks ever-outward by design—serving as the headwaters for the Rogue River and feeding waters into the Klamath River. Vesper Meadow is a place of connectivity.

The connections in this meadow weave together the past and the present, and they revolve around food—food for birds, butterflies, and people. In a blink of time, we can see the meadow: a thriving zone of biodiversity and habitat as well as a place of abundant food stores—in the form of a Camas bulb gathering ground called Ti'nth (as noted by Latgawa elders); then land taken by white settlers for grazing cattle; and today an environmental nonprofit working back to the spirit of connectivity that is imbued in this land.

Today's Vesper Meadow is home to a restoration education program directed by Jeanine Moy that enacts community-powered restoration, biological monitoring, and the enhancement of habitat corridors through Tribal and community partnerships. Native perennials and food plants are restored on site in habitat patches consisting of common camas, Oregon yampah, elderberry, Roemer's fescue, tufted hairgrass, sulfur buckwheat, and many native wildflowers. Reintroducing these plants repairs a web of connections—a web with something to offer all life involved. Habitat corridors provide for everyone.

At Vesper Meadow, human community members work to restore critical habitat while monitoring for the imperiled Vesper Sparrow and the endangered Mardon Skipper butterfly. The meadows are also a place to witness the return of elk, who visit again now that cattle have been taken off the land.

In the spirit of reciprocity, the land provides. This year, Vesper Meadow has started making products in collaboration with the native plants that grow there. Elderberry honey is their flagship value-added product. This simple act demonstrates how native habitat corridors can also be pathways to economic sustenance.

This exchange between people and plants has long roots, and so, at Vesper Meadow, it has been essential to follow the lessons of the land closely, to reach outward, and to weave webs of connection. This has been done by creating rich partnerships with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, various nonprofits, local businesses, artists, scientists, and private landowners. The Vesper Meadow Education Program is part of a movement to rebuild habitat beyond lines of property and to create a greater sense of connectivity for the human and more-than-human animals that live there.

There are so many small steps that other private landowners and farmers can take to form reciprocal relationships with the land they call home and with Indigenous groups in support of their self-determined goals. So much repair is possible in a simple action like growing culturally relevant native food plants, which will, in turn, tend to vulnerable wildlife communities in search of habitat. Restoring these places and relationships, in collaboration with neighboring property owners, can create a sprawling patchwork of passageways for the lives that need them.

The meadow is a starting place. The connections and corridors spill outward—like the rivers connecting this high meadow floodplain to the sea.

To learn more about Vesper Meadow Education Program visit: www.vespermeadow.org